

Transmigration

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[This essay was first published in December of 1903 in the journal "Buddhism", Volume 1 Number 2 on pages 289-312. Allan Bennett was a close friend and former teacher of Crowley's. Before becoming the buddhist known as Ananda Maitreya (better known as Ananda Metteya), he was an adept of the Golden Dawn (Frater Iehi Auor).]

**Say not "I am," "I was," or "I shall be";
Think not ye pass from house to house of flesh
Like travellers who remember and forget,
Ill-lodged or well-lodged
Fresh Issues upon the Universe that sum
Which is the lattermost of lives.
*Light of Asia, Book VIII***

RANGOON,
BURMA, 1903

Next to the very difficult question of the true significance of the word Nibbana, there can be no doubt that, of all the doctrines of the Buddhist Religion, the one which is least comprehensible to Occidental students, the one which has given rise to the greatest number of misconceptions, is that for which we are compelled, for want of a better expression, to employ the very inadequate word "Transmigration"- the passing over of the Kamma or Doing, the Sankhara or Tendencies, the Character or the Destiny, of one being to another at the moment of death or birth. So much has this doctrine proved a stumbling block for Western students, that those who have understood it not at all have seen in it a proof that the Buddha taught that doctrine which of all others he most strenuously denied; the existence in man of an immortal Soul, which, like the Jivatma of the Vedanta Philosophy, passes at death from one corporeal frame into another, itself unchanging and eternal; even as a man, casting from himself the worn-out raiment of a day, clothes himself in new vestures, yet is himself in nowise changed. Others, better comprehending the Buddhist doctrine yet going to the other extreme, have supposed that the true teaching of the Master was that at the death of a man, that man himself, as an individual, separate entity in the Ocean of Existence, perished forever, whilst of his Doing naught survived save the effect his life and speech and thought had had on all his fellows; even as, in common imagery of speech, we say that Shakespeare is immortal and yet lives amongst us, in that his marvellous works still dwell within our hearts, inspire our minds and mold our actions; though of the man himself nothing whatever yet endures.

To most Occidental minds, indeed this Buddhist doctrine of Transmigration appears either as a mystification or as a paradox, and for this fact it is no difficult to account. We are so steeped in the soul-theory, it has held so large part in our education and in our heredity, that it is difficult for us to follow, at first consideration at least, any hypothesis concerning future existence in which, at the very beginning, the existence of a Soul is denied. "How," ask, ' the Western student of Buddhism "How, if there is no Soul, no permanent entity which passes over from life to life, no reincarnating Ego or Self in man, how can we understand this saying, that a man's character and his destiny are but the fruits of his thoughts and words and actions in unnumbered past existences? How can we reconcile with such a doctrine the statement, so often put forward in the Tipitaka by the Teacher at the termination of some story of the past, that He Himself was such a person in the tale that He had told, and Ananda or another of His disciples was such another; how can we reconcile it with the tales so common even now in Buddhist lands, tales of past lives remembered and their detail confirmed; or yet again with the fact that one of the meditation-practices of Buddhism has for its aim the gaining of this very faculty of recollecting, that we may learn therefrom a

lesson, lives that are hidden from us by the veils of birth and death? How can these things be, if indeed there is no Soul or Self that has passed over, that can remember its past experiences and former lives, even as we now remember the scenes and doings of our childhoods' days?"

That such questions should arise at all is, as we have said, an instance of the hold the soul-theory has over the mind of man. We are so apt to center all our thoughts and actions in an imaginary Self within us, that the great lesson of Buddhist Psychology "This is not Mine, this I am not, there is no self herein" seems, till we have given it some thought, as but a paradox at best; and all our hopes and notions of the future life are founded on this Self, as something that shall endure, after the life we know has passed away. So strong, indeed, is this our human thirst for life, that the idea of an undying principle within is perhaps the widest spread of all principles of religious belief, and it is mainly on the ground of this soul-theory that the great conflict between Revealed Religion and Science has been and will be fought, the adherents of the various Religions other than Buddhism fighting to the last for the hope of a future life so dear to man; whilst, step by step, Science, by clear and irrefragable proofs, is analyzing this same "Soul" into the various mental elements of which it consists, and seeking to prove that all we know of man, character and mind as well as this corporeal frame, ends with the life of the body that maintained it, and leaves behind, at death, only a few decaying ounces of brain-stuff;—out of the total of the life of man, heir to immemorial ages of evolution, only this piteous clay, food for the fire and the worm.

Buddhism, true to its doctrine of the Middle Way, steers its clear course between these two extremes, maintaining, on the one hand, with our latter-day psychologists, that that which we name "Soul" is but a collection of mental phenomena and faculties, and, as such, fleeting and transient as are all things phenomenal; but, on the other, teaching that the Kamma, the Doing of each individual life survives the disruption of the mind that wrought it, and, till Nibbana's Peace shall be attained, continues to manifest itself in countless lives; death being but the gate of birth, and birth the prelude to another death. And it is just this Middle Doctrine that is to the Western mind, reared in an other school of thought, so difficult to comprehend or hold as true. If you believe in a living Soul, a Ghost that hides behind these walls of flesh, looks through our eyes in seeing, and uses the brain but as we use a subtle mechanism; then for us of the West the way seems clear to talk of future life—it is this Ghost which has left the body at death, and when the Seer and the Actor has gone, how should there be more a Seeing or a Doing? And, on the other hand, if, with clearer vision and with truer comprehension, you grasp the fact that to speak of Vitality or Life apart from all this bodily mechanism is, as a great scientist has aptly put it, like talking of the "Horology" of a clock, by way of explaining its going; then it seems to us as though, when the bodily mechanism has run down and all its functions fall asleep in death, it were in vain to talk of any future life; for what power shall gather yet again the atoms of the dewdrop into one, when once the radiance of the rising sun has seized upon it, and it has melted in the morning air? Thus it is that the Buddhist hypothesis seems strange to animist and scientist alike—to the one, because, it denies the existence of any Soul to pass; and to the other, because it maintains that the forces of a life yet hold together and persist as one, when Death has broken up the mechanism that produced them, and the winds have flung every particle that once composed the living organism wide over the land and sea.

"Naca O, na ca anno, " -- "It is not he, and yet is not another," -- this is the Buddhist statement of the extent of the persistence of identity between the man just dead and the being who, according to Buddhist ideas, springs into life in this world or another, at the very instant of the other's death. It is the first part of this statement, with its denial of identity, that seems impossible to the vitalist; the latter part, with its inference of a continued individuality, that the psychologist is unable to accept. Let us consider these two positions from the Buddhist standpoint, and see whether there is any common meeting-place between the two.

Two men are standing by the shore of a great lake, and are watching the waves upon its surface; that, starting far away upon the horizon, seem to draw near and nearer, and break at last in foam before their feet. Both are watching the same phenomenon, and yet to each it bears a different meaning. One has no knowledge of the laws of nature, but possesses a fund of what he terms good common sense; and—for his eyes tell him that this is so—to him there is a distant mass of water, which, impelled by the moving air that fans his face, travels from the horizon towards him, retaining always its identity and shape; and, if you ask

him what a wave is, he will tell you it is a mass of water that moves over the surface, by the power of the wind. The other has the trained mind of the scientific observer, and is acquainted with such few of the laws of nature as in the last few hundred years have become known to men, and to him the moving wave carries a very different meaning. For he knows that really there is no motion whatever of any mass of water in his direction, that at each point upon the surface of the lake the particles of water are only rising and then falling in their places, and that each particle in its turn, is passing on its motion to its next neighbor. To him there is no translation of matter, as to the other, but only a translation of force. In other words, the first man sees a motion of something material, and, owing to his ignorance of natural laws, mistakes the evidence of his sense for fact; the other, having a dynamic, and not a material conception of the phenomenon, sees only the translation of a portion of the universal energy, as it were individualized momentarily into a wave.

We know, of course, that the latter man, the man with the dynamic conception of the universe, is right; we know that there is no translation of water from place to place, but only the transference of an oscillatory force. Let us apply this lesson to existence. Let us grant for the moment that the two men we have spoken of are gifted with the power of seeing, not the heaving waters of an earthly lake, but the surging sea of conscious life-the power of looking back through past existences, till the mental vision fades on the far horizon of past eternity. Then the man of common sense will say of a certain wave that it itself is one enduring and unchanging thing, a separate portion of the waters of existence, retaining its identity, whilst its position and its surroundings change with each moment of the passing hours; he will have the point of view of the vitalist or of the Vedantist, and will believe in the existence of a Soul, itself unchanging and unchangeable, passing through the universe from place to place in time, yet never altering in its changeless individuality. But the instructed man will see only the translation of an individualized force; he will know that of the life which sprung into existence in the distant past, no element remains the same for even two succeeding moments; and that the wave upon life's ocean which now mounts into being in one place is not the same as that which but a moment previous sank to apparent rest, inasmuch as it has no particle in common with the previous life; yet is the same, inasmuch as it is the result of the passing-on of the Character, the Mental Forces, the Doing or Energy of that other life. "It is not he, nor is it yet another," and, as we take it, the precise difference between the founders of the Vedanta and the Buddha was as that between these two men in our simile-both have been looking with the Higher Insight on the same phenomenon-the one has held that vision all-sufficing, proof of the Soul's existence and immortality; the other, with clearer knowledge, has perceived the actual truth, that nowhere is there an enduring Soul, but only a transference of Character, the fruit of mental Action in the past. The Vedantist has seen Substance, an enduring Principle, an Ens; the Buddhist only Qualities, themselves in all their elements ever changing, but the sum total of their Doing passing steadily on, till the wave breaks upon Nibbana's shore, and is no more a wave for ever.

This is the Buddhist's answer to the animist, to him who, whether in high or low, in gross or subtle, imagines the existence of an enduring principle in man, a Soul which passes on from life to life, as the wave seems to pass from point to point of the sea. And to those who would maintain that it is difficult to conceive how the Character of one being can at the moment of his death in any way endure as such, or cause the existence of a similar individual; how, in a word, the *individuality* of the forces can persist after death, instead of being distributed throughout the universe, to these a similar analogy may serve to explain the Buddhist idea.

In the fierce radiance of a distant star a score of different elements are flaming, each tiny molecule of each tilting and trembling in its own peculiar way; and each, as it swings to and fro under the impact of the surging Aethyr, is sending forth a series of vibrations, the total of its Doing, the effect of its work upon the universe. Can either time or space avail to quench the individuality of one single wave, or take one flaming line from out the spectrum of each element? Not *even when the star itself has faded into dissolution*. But yesterday we beheld, flaming with a new glory in the skies, the light of Nova Persei, kindled anew by some tremendous conflagration; we read its message from the gulfs of space, and identified many a different element in its spectrum; and yet that outburst happened nigh upon three centuries ago, and Nova Persei may now be dead and cold. And could we travel with a greater velocity than that of light away from that dead star, once again might we behold that strange upheaval, and yet

again and again, far off and farther off, we might learn the secret of that conflagration, learn the identity, nowise unchanged by time or space, of each separate element that took part in that bygone cataclysm. The mechanism that gave rise to all that complex quivering of the Aethyr might indeed have ceased to operate ten million years, yet were our velocity great enough, our instruments perfect enough, our vision keen enough, we could again and again read that message flung wide into the abysses of the infinite, we would know that hydrogen had flamed out in that star, albeit it had died unnumbered centuries ago. And if the story Nova Persei told us still is telling somewhere in the depths of space, and will be telling so for so long as time shall endure, or the ocean of the Aethyr extend; if, centuries and milleniums after that conflagration is at end, the Doing of each element that took part in it still preserves and may record its individuality, how shall it seem strange that the vastly more complex Doing of the life and thought of man should similarly survive; and still be able, given the necessary mechanism, to reproduce, on earth or elsewhere, the Character and the Nature of what had once been a man?

For what is it that we really mean when we speak of a particular man? Surely, not the mere matter of his body-that we know is changing every minute as he lives and breathes. Not, also, Buddhism says, any enduring soul within him; but the sum total of his tendencies, his mental and other faculties; in a word, it is the Character we call John Smith. And for us conscious beings, that character is made up for the most part of certain energies, mental and other; and, when we analyze these energies further, we must conclude that they affect the universe around him, in a fashion altogether peculiar to himself; in exactly the same way as the molecule of hydrogen affects it; i.e., we may suppose that the ultimate of John Smith is a particular very highly complex vibration in the Aethyr. To put it more crudely, the human body is a machine, and the total of its energies may be estimated, like that of any other machine, by the fuel (in the form of food) needful to keep a man in health. When we calculate this to heat-units, we find that the total energy may be set down as roughly half a horsepower. Where, in the body, does that energy go? Largely towards carrying on the vital functions, and to doing any physical work in which the man may be employed. But there is one organ, the most important of all, namely the brain, which does no work that we can estimate directly, and yet it absorbs a large amount of the whole energy of the man. We may fairly take the amount of deoxidized blood that comes from any organ as a rough measure of the work that organ is doing. Of the total blood supply of the body, quite a fifth is used up in the brain; and, as the returning blood is if anything more deoxidized than usual, it is certain that the brain has somehow absorbed roughly a tenth-horsepower for its functioning. Setting aside the very liberal allowance of half of this for the control centers of the lower functions, we still have at least a twentieth of a horsepower, expended on what we know as thought, the perceptions and cognitions that make the peculiar Character of the man.

Now a twentieth of a horsepower is a large amount of energy. Still following purely physical lines, let us conceive that some part, perhaps the most, of all this output of energy, finds its expression in the man's perceptions, in what we call Thought in general, from the cognition of a simple sensation up to the most complex act of reasoning. Whatever Thought is, we must presume that it either results from, or is anyhow accompanied by, molecular changes occurring in the structure of the brain. This would follow from the deoxidization of the blood coming from that organ, and from the fact that when a man is doing hard mental work the cerebral blood supply is much increased. But all molecular changes with which we are acquainted impose strains upon the Aethyr, which result in setting up some sort of vibration in that medium. So we may regard thought as consisting in, or accompanied by, certain characteristic vibrations in the Aethyr; which we may conclude are vastly more complex than those, for instance, which iron gives off when it is intensely heated. On this view, even during life, a man is, so long as he is thinking and perceiving, constantly emanating a series of vibrations peculiar to himself -- as characteristic of him in their totality as the spectrum of iron is characteristic of that metal; and, had we a subtle vision and a spectroscope capable of perceiving and analyzing those vibrations, we should be able to identify our friend John Smith so long as he lived and affected the Aethyr in his own peculiar way. It may not even be many years before the substance is discovered which will react to these thought-emanations, even as selenium reacts to particular waves of common light; and then, like many another seeming far-fetched theory, the dream of thought-transference may become an actual fact.

John Smith, then, in a sense is immortal; nay, every thought he thinks is deathless, and will persist, somewhere in the depths of infinity, ages after his form has crumbled into dust. But it is not this part of his energy that results in the formation of a new being when he dies-that is another matter; and, still further following this simile, I shall endeavour to show how it may happen. At the same time it must of course be understood that it is only a simile-or rather one way of putting things, looking at the universe as composed of Substance, whether we call that Substance matter or Aethyr; whilst the actual view of the Buddhist is that it is a mental state that we call matter, and that apart from the conception of it there is no form or matter or substance at all.

We may then consider the moment of John Smith's death. During his life he has not alone been setting in vibration the great ocean of the Aethyr, he has most of all been affecting, with every changing thought and mood, his own mental structure, as summed up in the fabric of his brain. So that, at the moment before his death, all his life, nay, all the life of all his ancestry, and, as we Buddhists would say, also his own past lives, is as it were existing pictured in a definite and characteristic molecular structure, a tremendously complicated representation of all that we have meant by the term John Smith; but which, unknown to him and unperceived by all, is really the outcome of the ages-the ages when John Smith was in the making, the record of the thoughts and doings of unnumbered Lives. Each tiny cell of all the millions which compose the grey stuff of his brain may be likened to a charged Leyden jar, the nerve paths radiating from it thrill betimes with its discharges, carrying its meaning and its message through the man's whole body, and, through the Aethyr, even to the infinitudes of space. Each cell is as it were provided with its own laboratory of appliances, its resistances, insulators, switches, and through these, when it is functioning normally, its total discharge is prevented, so that never at any time can more than a fraction of its stored up energy be dissipated -- no more than the busy blood corpuscles can repair at once. And every separate cell of all those myriads has stored up in it a tremendous energy, a portion of all the energies, the passions, the desires, the hopes, the noble aspirations, that together go to make the marvel that we name a man.

And then Death comes; and, in the moment of its coming, all that locked up energy flames on the universe like a newborn star, for through the wondrous laboratory that we call the brain a sudden final cataclysm has shattered all the subtle apparatus; and, the restraining and inhibiting appliances having broken down, each little cell is utterly discharged. Imagine a being whose eyes were sensitive to the range of vibration known as thought, and he would see the man's death as we saw Nova Persei -- a sudden conflagration in the galaxies of mind, revealing, could one but analyze it in some psychic spectroscope, the mental record of what was once a man; and, like the story of the stellar cataclysm, speeding on and on through space, so that the observer on a distant star might now be watching at the death of Newton or of Rameses the Great.

Now, setting aside the question of the possible existence of a substance opaque to our thought-vibrations, there is but one way which we know whereby the waves produced by a man's death might be arrested and their energy absorbed. If we have a flame, giving off let us say, the yellow light of sodium, that light will, barring the presence of an opaque object, go on to all eternity, except and unless it comes to a layer of sodium vapor, i.e., to the one substance in the universe which is similar in structure to the molecule which emitted it. Then a very strange thing will happen -- a thing so strange that we have no clear and simple explanation for it, although we know that it will always happen. For *the sodium vapor will absorb the sodium light*, and probably every element in suitable physical state will absorb the rays that element itself gives off when heated to a higher temperature-a phenomenon well manifested in stars of the same type as our sun, where the elements in the gaseous envelope about it all take up light of the same order as that which they emit at higher temperatures, giving a continuous spectrum crossed by black absorption lines.

What has become of the energy they thus absorb we do not know-only that, as energy is indestructible, it must be somehow still existent, presumably in the substance that has absorbed it, locked up and latent, may be, yet still there. And we may perhaps see in this absorption a type of what occurs at a man's death, and the secret of the springing-up of a new life in dependence on the first.

For what substance can in this case present so similar a structure to the dying brain, save only the brain of a child or being at that instant born, which by its physical heredity is akin to the brain of the man who dies? And it is some such action that we Buddhists think does really occur. Our hooks teach us, indeed, of the existence of innumerable worlds, and of six great divisions of existence in our own little world. But, as the nature of those worlds is different, and as man necessarily resembles man more than any other creature, we may confine our considerations to the world of men alone. Somewhere, at the moment of a man's death, there is being born a child of parentage such that the little brain can respond to and absorb the Character of the dying man;- a brain that, without just that sort of stimulus, will never be galvanized into individual life. The man dies, and his death perturbs the Aethyr in the very complex way characteristic of that man;-and, at the same instant, almost, a newborn child, hovering then very near to death, receives the impact of the death-wave, and its brain thrills to a new life; the heart and respiratory centers suddenly are galvanized into action --the newborn child draws breath and lives, or, as our Buddhist Scriptures put it, "the new lamp is lighted from the dying flame."

This image may serve also as an explanation of another difficulty, namely, the part that heredity plays in the theory of transmigration; and how it is that the Buddhist teaching on this matter maintains that when a good man dies it will be as a child of virtuous parents that his rebirth Kamma will react; how learning of a special nature is thus carried over, and in short, how the new life presents a group of mental and moral characteristics in every way similar to those of the past life. We may see this clearer from a consideration of what syntony implies. If, here in Rangoon, there is an apparatus for producing the Aethyric waves discovered by Hertz, and so adjusted that it produces waves of but one special wavelength; and if all around there are receiving appliances in which Aethyric waves will close an electric circuit and so repeat a signal, yet these appliances are tune or syntonised so as only to respond to other waves; then there will be no response in all those instruments. But if at Mandalay or at Calcutta there is a receiving appliance nearly syntonised, then that appliance, distant though it be, will respond to the waves produced -- the local electric circuit will be closed, and the existence of the wave made manifest. So, we may take it, it is with the passing-over of the forces of a man at death. There might be a hundred children being born at that moment in the town around him, but if he were, say, a profoundly learned man, and all these children were born of parents having no similar heredity, then that man's death-wave would affect none of these; but would pass unabsorbed until it came, perhaps to a far distant child, having, by virtue of a special heredity, a brain capable of responding within a small range near to that learned sort of death-wave. And in like manner with all sorts of men; some few, with lives and instincts but little above the brutes, may at their death only evolve such waves as can stimulate some animal to life; whilst others may so have lived that only a higher birth than that of man can fulfill the nobler life they led.

Thus, in this theory, the phenomena of heredity are accounted for-it is only where a suitable heredity exists that the death-wave can thrill the newborn brain to action, just as the rightly syntonized apparatus alone can respond to the Aethyric wave. And, of course, in following this analogy, it must always be remembered that the child's *life* does not come from the action of the death-wave on its brain; the latter serves but as the Aethyric wave acts, in closing the circuit of the coherer;-it is the *instigator* of the life, but not its cause; it acts on cells all perfect, ready to respond and thrill to life, in the same fashion that an Aethyric wave will act in starting an arc or spark between two terminals, themselves at a difference of potential incapable of bridging the gulf that lies between them. The actual structure of the brain, the blood, the body and the latency of life are all, of course, the direct progeny of the parents; but, according to our ideas, there is needed something else than these, the subtle energy needful to start that mechanism into individual being; and that, we think, can only come from what, in my simile, I have termed the death-wave-from the Kamma of a being who at that moment has expired. Where the appropriate stimulus in this respect is lacking, then, although brain and blood and body are all perfect, although the latency of life is there, yet there can be no galvanizing into life, and the child never lives; or seems to carry on vital functions for a few seconds only, as it were automatically, without ever waking into individual life.

And now, before proceeding further, a few words of caution may be necessary, lest what I have written should be misunderstood. As I have already said, the hypothesis that I have been giving is intended only as an illustration, as one way of looking at what from another aspect may appear in quite a different light. Personally, it seems to me that some such mechanism as that I have suggested may serve

to temporarily bridge over the gulf of our ignorance of the passing over of a life. To present a thing as a physical possibility is, to my mind, a far more satisfactory way of working than to go beyond the laws of physics; for once this is done, the theory is a possible working hypothesis no longer, but has entered into the realm of mere speculation or faith. If we adhere to physics in our hypotheses, we have the great advantage of knowing that, given certain definite conditions, such-and-such results must certainly ensue; we can to a certain extent test our hypotheses, and can follow them out with a fair degree of logical correctness. And the reason of this lies in the fact that the physical sciences are founded on the mathematical correlation of phenomena, and in-so-far as they are mathematical they are expressions of *relative* truth. But, of course, it must always be remembered that we are not acquainted with a material universe at all-the collection of phenomena to which we give that name is in reality a collection of *mental*, not material, phenomena; and when, for example, we speak of a cubic centimeter of water as weighing one gram, we are merely expressing certain relations in our own minds; and we have no proof that there is any Thing-in-itself, outside and beyond our minds, to which our statement always applies; or indeed that there is any universe, or time, or space, or other conditionings, outside of the limits of our own consciousnesses. When we dream, for example, there is apparently a universe, and time, and space;- sometimes a different sort of time and space to that with which we are acquainted in the waking life; but nobody but a hopeless animist imagines that he goes in dreams to a new sort of world where the conditions are different -- it is of course merely a change, not in the universe outside us, but of the mental universe, the States of Consciousness within. In so far, then, as the physical sciences supply us with a means of illustrating and clarifying our ideas, and of expressing certain relationships in the form of relative truth, their use is both legitimate and necessary; but we must not be led away by the idea that the universe of which they treat is a *real* universe, a Thing-in-itself outside of our own minds, for this we have no possible means of ascertaining. It is the mental phenomena, and the mental phenomena only, which we cognize, and the relations of which we determine; and all our science is but the expression of certain laws, relations, and limitations of our own minds. If an order of beings existed, gifted with an intelligence similar to ours, but with a different structure in time and space, the laws of the universe deduced by such beings would be entirely different to those which we have arrived at; still more different if the intelligence itself were of a different order altogether.

And this is really the view taken of this question of Transmigration in the Buddhist Scriptures. All question of a physical machinery is ignored, and the sole thing dealt with is the transference at the moment of death of the Sankharas or Tendencies of the individual. And the actual *manner* of this transference is said to be incognizable --we can only get a glimmering of the fashion in which it occurs by the use of similes, such as the standard one given in the Buddhist Books of the new lamp being lighted from the dying flame, or such more elaborate images as I have employed in the foregoing pages. We see, in a word, the phenomena, and at that all our knowledge ends. We have considered in what manner this passing-over of the character of an individual may take place, and must now pass on to the discussion of the arguments in support of the Buddhist statement that it does take place at all. This statement is, for the majority of mankind at least, a pure hypothesis-as much a hypothesis, for example, as the existence of the Aethyr of modern physical science. Nobody, using those mental faculties and sense which are common to all mankind, ever has had any direct testimony as to the existence of the Aethyr at all; and yet we take the Aethyr as a convenient working hypothesis, because what we mean by that term offers an explanation for otherwise obscure phenomena, and fulfills the requirements of the several sciences. We have, then, to enquire whether there seems to be any need of a theory of Transmigration to account for certain phenomena; and whether that theory will cover the known facts about human births and deaths.

We may conveniently divide these arguments into four heads in progressive order of importance as follows:-(1) the argument from experience,(2) the argument of Moral Law, (3) the argument from the insufficiency of heredity to account for the observed conditions, and (4) the argument from vital statistics.

As regards the first of these, not much is to be said, for the simple reason that such experience can, for the most part, be convincing only to the person experiencing it. Briefly it is to the effect that certain persons allege themselves to be able to remember events of their past lives-a faculty which may be natural or may be acquired by the practice of a special mental training given in Visuddhi Magga and elsewhere. This does not, we must hasten to add, imply anything mysterious or magical-it is simply an

extension of the ordinary powers of memory. Of course such cases are entirely without value except where the statements can be shown to be outside the normal knowledge of the percipient, and to be founded on facts with which he could not have become acquainted in the normal course of things. In Buddhist countries, it is no very unusual thing to have children gravely claiming to have had such-and-such a name, and to have lived in such-and-such a place, in their previous lives; and occasionally these claims are in a sort of fashion substantiated.

Such children are in Burma called *Winzas*, and it is no uncommon thing for a sort of rough test to be carried out by taking a *Winza* to the scene of his former life, when it is said that he or she can generally identify his former dwelling and friends, and can state facts known only to the dead person and one other living man. These *Winzas* are so relatively frequent in Burma that their existence is commonly taken for granted; the power of remembering the past life is generally stated to disappear as the child grows up, though we have met adult *Winzas* who still claim to remember the past. For the present it will be best to proceed directly with the enumeration of the arguments advanced in support of Transmigration.

The argument as to the Moral Law is a species of *argumentum ad hominem*, and is cogent only with those who believe in the existence of a Moral Law in the universe. It may be stated thus:- Here in our human life alone we see men and women born in all manner of different positions, in every species of environment, with possibilities for good and evil the most diverse; and the question naturally arises, to what previous cause can the diversity of these conditionings be assigned? The answer on the lines of this argument will be that if there exist a Moral Law in the universe, then, as we know that no effect is produced without a cause, these differences of position and opportunity are the fruit of a moral condition in the past, i.e., in a past existence; and to account for them in a manner compatible with human ideas of justice, etc., the theory of Transmigration (or equally the Hindu idea of Reincarnation) seems the only tenable hypothesis. For, on that theory, if a man is suffering now, it is because he has done evil in past lives, and *vice versa*; and so the apparent injustices of life are apparently set aside. We see, in effect, this "Moral Law" working in the lives of men -- how certain forms of wrongdoing carry with them an inevitable penalty of suffering, and it is not difficult to understand the Buddhist position that a man who apparently goes scatheless in this life has so far damaged his own mind by his misdeeds that he will certainly suffer in after lives, for all the evil he has done in this; for it is his mind alone that starts the forces which go to build the future life. The difficulty which many have in conceiving a Moral Law-for all the Laws we know act equally on good and bad alike-may be lessened if this view, that a man by doing "evil" harms his own mind, be accepted; and Morality will then take a place higher than mere sentiment can give it, as a species of science of mental hygiene.

As to the argument from heredity, we know that the ascertained facts of life can only be imperfectly solved on this ground. If heredity were an absolute law, then all the children of the same parents-or at all events all twins-should have exactly the same mental abilities. We know they have not, we know that every individual child is different; and the Buddhist accounts for this fact by saying that heredity is only a little part, and that each child has really the Kamma of its own past lives as the foundation of its character-that the heredity of a man only acts in so far as his own Kamma is concordant with it, by the process of selective absorption set forth in our physical analogy. Apart from trivial variations, the theory of heredity pure and simple is quite unable to account for the remarkable instances of sporadic genius which occasionally occur; cases of children born of illiterate parents who, even in early childhood have manifested the most remarkable talents, such as a wonderful memory, a capacity for mathematics, music, for the sciences. The theory of Transmigration, and that theory alone, would seem to cover all those phenomena. It is not a sufficient explanation to set them down as due to accidental variations, for there can be no such thing as accident-that to which we assign that name is only a cloak for our ignorance of some unknown law. The law which will explain the divergences from heredity is the law of Transmigration.

Now we come to the final argument, that from vital statistics, and here, for the present, I can give but the barest outlines of that argument, leaving the facts to be dwelt with in a separate paper in future, for the matter is one of special importance. Briefly, it may be stated thus. In civilized races there is less tendency to extremes of individuality than in semi-civilized, and we may take it for granted that many of the mental characteristics, say of a Londoner, are common to most Londoners; and different to those,

say, of a Parisian. With such accentuated characteristics, it is natural to expect, on the theory of Transmigration, that the dying Londoner will tend to take rebirth as a Londoner, and not as a Parisian. But if the majority of dying Londoners actuate a London birth, then, balancing off the normal rise in population, we will expect to find that any variation in the death rate of London will be accompanied by a similar variation in the birth rate. And this-as I shall show for various towns and countries in a future article, is an almost invariable rule. The divergencies from the average of London death rates and birth rates are synchronous-a fact which can only be explained by the theory of Transmigration; for it is impossible to suppose that the conditions which cause a rise of death rate can be suitable for causing a rise of birth rate also. Especially this syntony is noticeable in the case of catastrophes which unusually increase the death rate. When the Black Death swept over Europe it was everywhere followed by an unusual rise in the birth rate and double and even triple births were very common. The same is true of wars. When the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 raised the French death rate considerably above the normal, it was followed by a sudden rise in the birth rate; and the noticeable thing about this rise was that the male births were far in excess of the female-a fact which would exactly fit the theory of Transmigration, and which can be accounted for on that theory alone. It is only men who are killed in modern warfare, and according to Buddhist ideas such men as would be killed in battle would be the sort of men that would take rebirth as men, and not as women. Many other similar instances must be left to a future occasion-suffice it now to say that, as a general rule, there is a syntony between the death and birth rates; a syntony which, in our opinion, can only be accounted for by the Buddhist hypothesis of Transmigration.

We have now taken a general survey of all that is implied to Buddhists in the word transmigration, and it only remains to consider what this Buddhist theory really amounts to. The first thing that will probably occur to the Western reader is, that there is here nothing at all of personal immortality. We are immortal, in the Buddhist view, only in so far as we are a portion of the forces of the great Ocean of Existence. All life is one in very truth, and that which today our ignorance calls "I" was yesterday the force that flamed in a bygone star, and will tomorrow be speeding outwards to eternity; entering here a new life and there awaking in a distant alien mind the thought that once was ours; life flashing as light from star to star, and nowhere an end of it, nowhere a beginning, so long as Thought, Thought that has built the Universe about us, shall endure. Thus, in the Buddhist view of life, there is no conception of personal immortality -- "Abbhantare jivo n'atthi" -- "there is no future life" --for life as we have known it is but a little ripple in the Ocean of Existence, which yesterday was not, and tomorrow shall be no more for ever.

And if to those trained in another way of thought, if to him who has cherished the chimera of selfhood till all the universe were vain without his personal and continued life, if to such an one the Master's teaching should seem dreary and forlorn, yet to the true Buddhist otherwise appears this solemn lesson of the mystery of life. For him it is great and heart-inspiring, this doctrine of the transmigration, and the secret source of all true happiness; to him who knows himself as Master of Eternity -- the Moulder and the Fashioner this day of a new and grander life to come;- what matter if another should enjoy the fruits, so long as he may have the privilege of sowing them.?

And so his hopes and aspirations, free of the sad and selfish dream of personal immortality, are fixed, not on the future, but on the life he lives-the one life over which he has in very truth control, which he may make grander and more pure and noble than it came to him from bygone immemorial lives. To live in love with all that lives, not seeking or not earning for tomorrow's guerdon; to make of his life an oasis in the desert of self-desire; to strive ever, even here and now, after true Love and Wisdom and the Perfect Peace;-this is for the Buddhist the supreme ideal, the glory of his Dhamma and the hope of all his ways. All else-all thought of future gain on life for self, is but a mockery and delusion. As something real and true, as Buddhaghosa tells us, there rises in us the thought "I am," "I was" or "I shall be." And it is all illusion, the dewdrop deeming itself a permanent and separate entity, though the waters which compose it lay yesterday in the ocean's depths, and with the dawning light will rise and melt into the wandering airs. But if this universal life be ever changing, sorrowful, and without a Soul, there is still, our Religion teaches, an End and a Cessation. Thought is the Creator of these worlds, the Builder of this earthly tabernacle, the Maker of Illusion; and to him who gains the victory over Thought comes in this life the Unutterable Peace. He is the Victor who here and now has triumphed over Ignorance; who has overcome

all Passion, Hatred and Illusion, and has passed where nevermore the woes of earth can come. To him is joy beyond all joy we know, the joy of Liberation from this vanity of life; who knows that for him rebirth is finished and his toil at end; and that, when Death shall claim his body, there will be no more of Change or Sorrow or Delusion, even as the Master has said:-

**Decay must come to all that is,
Impermanent the Elements of life!
What has been born must cease to be;
Surely in Cessation alone is Happiness!**